*Jim Crow Laws & Black Codes*

**Secondary Information:**

After the 13th, 14th, and 15th amendments were passed, people in the South still did not want to accept African Americans into their society. This was because whites had always been used to being superior to blacks, and it was difficult for them to see them as their equals. In order to keep African Americans as “second class” citizens, that is, second to whites, black codes were passed. These were laws intended to restrict the freedom and opportunities of African Americans.

Black codes served three purposes. The first was to say what they *could* do. Under the black codes, African Americans were allowed to own property, work for wages, marry, and file lawsuits (bring someone up on a charge in court). Other civil rights, like the right to serve on a jury or to vote, were denied. The second purpose of the black codes was to make sure that planters still had people to work for them even though they did not have slaves. So, the codes required that freedmen sign a yearly labor contract. Those who did not could be arrested and sent to work for a planter.

Lastly, black codes were made in order to keep a social order. This means that they were made in order to make sure that whites were seen as higher than whites in society. The codes did not allow blacks to move up in jobs or do very much else than farm labor. For example, they could not own their own businesses. This prevented them from making money.

Jim Crow laws were similar to the black codes, in that they tried to prevent blacks from being equal to whites. Under Jim Crow laws, African Americans were not allowed to sit with whites in buses or rail cars. Restaurants and other businesses served whites only or black customers separately. These are just a few more examples of how blacks were discriminated against.

**Primary Information:**

In regards to the black codes, a Northern journalist wrote:

*“The whites seemed wholly unable to comprehend that freedom for the blacks means the same thing as freedom for them. They readily admit that the Government has made him free, but appear to believe that they still have the right to exercise over him the same old control.”*

-- Sidney Andrews, *Atlantic Monthly*, 1866

**Jim Crow Laws in Pictures:**





*Plessy v. Ferguson*

**Secondary Information:**

*Plessy v. Ferguson* was a major court case that took place in 1896. Homer Plessy was a black man who had been arrested for sitting in a whites-only railroad car in Louisiana. He went to the courts for help in protecting his rights.

Plessy said that Jim Crow laws violated the equal protection clause of the Fourteenth Amendment. The equal protection clause said that all people would be treated fairly under the law despite their race. In 1896, the case went to the Supreme Court- the highest a legal fight can go.

The majority of the justices (the judges on the Supreme Court) ruled that segregation, or the separation of blacks and whites, was constitutional (that is, did not break the laws of the Constitution) as long as the facilities provided to blacks were equal to those provided for whites. That meant that the Supreme Court said that blacks and whites could be kept separate as long as *where* they were being separated in were equal for both races.

This “separate but equal” ruling was soon applied to almost every aspect of life in the south. However, the facilities set apart for African American in Southern states were seldom equal to those labeled “whites only”. That is, facilities for whites were almost always better than those for blacks.

Some African Americans chose to move to the North, rather than endure the humiliation of forced segregation. Most African Americans, however, remained in the South and got by as best they could. With participation in politics closed to them, they focused on their families, churches, and communities. African Americans also banded together to build schools and colleges for their children.

**Primary Information:**

"The object of the [Fourteenth] Amendment was undoubtedly to enforce the absolute equality of the two races before the law, but in the nature of things it could not have been intended to abolish distinctions based upon color, or to enforce social, as distinguished from political, equality, or a commingling of the two races upon terms unsatisfactory to either."

—Justice Henry Billings Brown,  speaking for the majority of the Supreme Court

*Lynching:*

**Secondary Information:**

There were several restrictions on black rights throughout the time of Reconstruction. While some blacks accepted it as a fact of their lives, others protested, or fought back, openly. When blacks fought back, they put themselves at risk for being lynched—killed by hanging—by white mobs.

Lynching occurred most frequently in Mississippi, followed by Louisiana and Texas. Sometimes it had a motivation, such as striking back against a black who had opposed their oppression. Other times, it just occurred. Either way, it was a brutal practice that was used in order to scare blacks into cooperating.

**Primary Information:**

The purpose of this pamphlet is to give the public the facts, in the belief that there is still a sense of justice in the American people, and that it will yet assert itself in condemnation of outlawry and in defense of oppressed and persecuted humanity. In this firm belief the following pages will describe the lynching of nine colored men, who were arrested near Palmetto, Georgia, about the middle of March, upon suspicion that they were implicated in the burning of the three houses in February preceding.

The nine suspects were not criminals, they were hard-working, law-abiding citizens, men of families. They had assaulted no woman, and, after the lapse of nearly a month, it could not be claimed that the fury of an insane mob made their butchery excusable. They were in the custody of law, unarmed, chained together and helpless, awaiting their trial. They had no money to employ learned counsel to invoke the aid of technicalities to defeat justice. They were in custody of a white Sheriff, to be prosecuted by a white State's Attorney, to be tried before a white judge, and by a white jury. Surely the guilty had no chance to escape.

Still they were lynched. That the awful story of their slaughter may not be considered overdrawn, the following description is taken from the columns of the Atlanta Journal, as it was written by Royal Daniel, a staff correspondent. The story of the lynching thus told is as follows:

Palmetto. Ga., March 16.--A mob of more than 100 desperate men, armed with Winchesters and shotguns and pistols and wearing masks, rode into Palmetto at 1 o'clock this morning and shot to death four Negro prisoners, desperately wounded another and with deliberate aim fired at four others, wounding two, believing the entire nine had been killed.

-- Ida B. Wells

**Lynching In Pictures:**



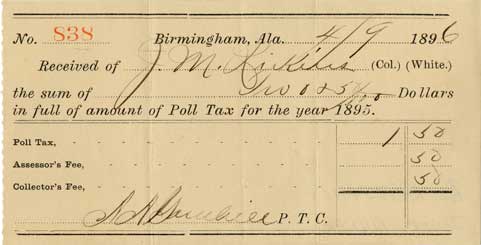
*Poll Taxes:*

**Secondary Information:**

Many states in the South passed laws requiring citizens who wanted to vote pay a poll tax. This tax was set high enough to make voting a luxury that most blacks could not afford. Some states also required potential voters to pass a literacy test. The tests were made so difficult that almost nobody could pass, no mater how well educated.

Poll taxes were set up so that blacks could not afford to vote. Because they had to pay if the wanted to vote, many did not because they didn’t have the money to. This again made it so that whites could control the government, as they did NOT have to pay to vote.

**Primary Information/Poll Tax In Pictures:**

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*The KKK and Redeemers:*

**Secondary Information:**

Most Southern whites could not accept the idea of former slaves voting and holding office. Many were white supremacists who believed in the superiority of the white race. The most radical group turned to violence, forming terrorist groups with names like the White Brotherhood and the Knights of the White Camelia. Members of the best known terror group, the Ku Klux Klan, had to swear that they were, “opposed to negro equality, both social and political.”

These groups terrorized blacks and white Republicans to keep them from voting. Their tactics included the burning of African-American schools, attacks on Freedmen’s Bureau officials, and even outright murder.

Redeemers were another white supremacist group that took power in Southern States. Their goal was to redeem, or save, the South by returning it to “white man’s rule”. “The whole south,” said a freedman, “had got into the hands of the very men who held us as slaves.” Once in office, the Redeemers reversed improvements made in education for black children. They also supported poll taxes and literacy tests to keep blacks from voting.

**Primary Information:**

*Men and women come scarred, mangled, and bruised, and say: "The Ku-Klux came to my house last night and beat me almost to death, and my old woman right smart, and shot into the house, 'bust' the door down, and told me they would kill me if I made complaint;" and the bloody mangled forms attest the truth of their declarations.*

*These crimes have been of every character imaginable. Perhaps the most usual has been the dragging of men and women from their beds, and beating their naked bodies with hickory switches, or as witnesses in an examination the other day said, sticks" between a "switch" and a "club." From 50 to 100 blows is the usual allowance, sometimes 200 and 300 blows are administered. Occasionally an instrument of torture is owned. Thus in one case two women, one 74 years old, were taken out, stripped naked, and beaten with a paddle, with several holes bored through it. The paddle was about 30 inches long, 3 or 4 inches wide, and 1/4 of an inch thick, of Oak. Their bodies were so bruised and beaten that they were sickening to behold. They were white women and of good character until the younger was seduced, and swore her child to its father. Previous to that and so far as others were concerned her character was good.*

*Again, there is sometimes a fiendish malignity and cunning displayed in the form and character of the outrages. For instance, a colored man was placed astride of a log, and an iron staple driven through his person into the log. In another case, after a band of them had in turn violated a young negro girl, she was forced into bed with a colored man, their bodies were bound together face to face, and the fire from the hearth piled upon them. The K.K.K. rode off and left them, with shouts of laughter. Of course the bed was soon in flames, and somehow they managed to crawl out, though terribly burned and scarred. The house was burned.*

-- Judge Albion Tourgee

**The KKK in Picture:**

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